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ABSTRACT

An education service center providing inservice programs to constituent school districts acted upon a recommendation that an independent evaluation component be added to their center for the purpose of improving their programs. This report of the first-year experience with the evaluation component is divided into four sections. The first section provides background information on funding evaluation as a contract service and discusses related problems. Included in the second section is a description of difficulties encountered in realizing and establishing the component. The third section gives some of the problems faced with recruiting qualified staff and how these problems were solved. The last section details some of the products of the component for its first year. (JD)

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ESTABLISHING AN EVALUATION COMPONENT IN AN EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY: FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES

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The State of Texas is divided into twenty regions serviced by intermediate education service agencies whose purpose is to provide services to constituent school districts. In the fall of 1976 one of these agencies, Education Service Center, Region 20, located in San Antonio, began to closely examine programs being provided to the fifty school districts it serves.

A seven member committee then took a closer look at this problem and recommended that the Center consider establishing an independent evaluation component--something few other intermediate agencies possessed. In July, 1977, after a nationwide search, a Coordinator for the component was selected. During August the Coordinator recruited three additional staff members and the component began operation in September, 1977. This paper chronicles the development and growth of the component during the first year.

Background

The Center demonstrated a very strong commitment to evaluation before staffing the component. To be successful evaluation must have institutional obligation (Salasin and Davis, 1975) and organizational commitment (Walker, 1972). Without these conditions, objective findings will not result and controversial issues cannot be discussed openly. When setting up the component, Center staff understood the importance of having strong commitment to evaluation. Agencies having strong evaluation groups were invited to the Center to explain the concept of program evaluation as it applied to an Education Service Center setting. Bill Denton and Robert Grobe from the Dallas Independent School District and David Gillmore from Education Service

Center, Region 13, In Austin assisted greatly in the initial phases of establishing the component.

Committed to the concept of program evaluation, the Executive Director and Board of Directors created the component so that it was organizationally independent of the programs it evaluates (the Coordinator of Evaluation reports directly to Executive Director), and fiscally independent in that it manages its own monies. The component receives no subsidy from the Center and pays all costs associated with operation including building rental, desk, supplies, typewriters and salaries. Continued funding for the component is assured by a statement of policy whereby evaluation cost are written in most of the forty-some federal and state grants received by the Center. During the first and continuing into the second year, this amount was set at 8% of program cost. Part of the statement of policy is as follows:

> Cost of Evaluation Services is written into all appropriate proposals as a contracted service. The level of funding for such services is determined by Evaluation Services, ranging from six percent to ten percent of direct program costs, based on previous year's time and effort records. These records reflect the number of hours required for valid program evaluation.
>
> Evaluation Services manages its own accounts; funds are transferred directly into Evaluation Services accounts. Additional funding is secured from other Region 20 sources at the discretion of the Executive Director. Evaluation Services is encouraged to supplement this basic support.
>
> Questions posed by funding authorities regarding amount of evaluation funds should be directed to the Coordinator of Evaluation Services.

By their very structure, Texas Education Service Centers are ideal for accepting and nurturing the concept of evaluation. Resistance to evaluation is invariably present (Salasin and Davis, 1975); furthermore, resistance to integrating a new entity into an institution is predictable (Getzels, Lipham and Campbell, 1968). In both cases the individual and the institution

will oppose to some extent planned change. As an intermediate education agency, the Center possesses three special characteristics which enhance evaluation's being successful and correspondingly reduce the predisposition toward resistance. These characteristics include that the Center functions as a change agent, that it has a fairly stable political environment and that communication is less distorted at Region 20 due to the internal focus of the evaluation component.

A primary function of Texas Education Service Centers is to serve as a change agent for schools in their service area. The underlying philosophy of openness and flexibility associated with being the change agent makes the Center and its staff relatively amenable to a planned change such as setting up an evaluation component. Texas Education Service Centers are generally not subjected to as much political pressure as their state and local education counterparts. Each Center's Board of Directors is elected by a Joint Committee comprised of school superintendents in districts served by the Center and representatives from colleges and universities having teacher education programs which are located within the Center's boundaries. The Executive Director is appointed by the Board of Directors. The stability of Education Service Center, Region 20, in particular is shown by the fact that the Center has had only one Executive Director since its inception in 1967.

Related to the two characteristics described above, a third characteristic contributing to reduced resistance is that there are relatively few groups involved in the political process of presenting evaluation information and having it used for programmatic improvement--a situation that facilitates communication and reduces distortion. The component evaluates Center projects serving school districts; it's "clients" are project and administrative

staff of the Center. Hence, evaluation is primarily internally focused (although projections are to expand more direct services to school districts). Evaluation reports are presented to the Executive Committee, which consists of nine superintendents from the Joint Committee, and to Center's Board of Directors. In summary, unique characteristics of Texas Education Service Centers and Region 20 in particular lessen the resistance to evaluation. This is not to say, however, that resistance to evaluation was not present during the components' first year. The nature of this resistance will be discussed later in the paper.

When setting up the component, it was important to identify a philosophy and select an approach to evaluation. The underlying philosophy in setting up the evaluation component was to collect quality evaluation data that would be useful to Center staff in making programmatic improvements.[1] In elaboration Roecks (1979) wrote:

> Traditionally evaluation data has been used very little by project staff in making programmatic decisions. This unfortunate occurrence has caused project staff to view evaluation unfavorably. It has also caused those conducting evaluation considerable discouragement. Recently several authors, including Cox (1977) and Patton (1978), have suggested the resolution to this problem lies in evaluation staff providing information that project staff agree will be useful for making programmatic decisions. Implementing this approach means that it is necessary for evaluation and program staff to cooperately decide what kind of information will be collected <u>before</u> it is collected. This information is then included in an evaluation plan, which is signed by both project and evaluation staff.

In accepting this philosophy, it became readily apparent that a formative approach to evaluation (where project and evaluation staff work in concert) was in most cases more appropriate than a summative approach (where project and evaluation staff generally work apart and a judgement about a program is made). The component, embracing a philosophy of data utilization supported by a formative approach to evaluation, saw it as essential that evaluation staff have strong inter-personal skills and be good communicators.

Several authors (Patton (1978); Cox (1977); Salasin and Davis (1975) claim the key to reducing resistance to evaluation and ultimately causing better use of evaluation findings lies in the personal characteristics of the evaluator. Surprisingly, this factor was found to be the most important even when compared to traditional "givens" such as methodological quality and appropriateness, timeliness, political factors, available resources and the positive and negative nature of findings. In describing the personal factor Patton (1978) states:

> The specifics vary from case to case, but the pattern is markedly clear: where the personal factor emerges or some individual takes direct personal responsibility for getting the information to the right people evaluations have an impact. Yet if the personal factor is absent there is a marked absence of impact. Utilization is not simply determined by some configuration of abstract factors; it is determined in large part by real life caring human beings. p. 69

From the onset, considerable importance was placed on dedicated staff with strong inter-personal skills. This decision dramatically shaped the direction and component priorities during the year.

The remainder of the paper is presented in four sections. The first section provides some background information on funding evaluation as a contract service and discusses related problems. Included in the second section is a description of some of the road blocks encountered by the component in realizing and establishing its purpose within the institution. The third section gives some of the problems faced with recruiting qualifed staff and how these problems were ultimately solved. The last section details some of the products of the component for its first year.

Funding as a contracted service

Monies are received from each program as a contracted service for evaluation. Unless expressly prohibited by funding guidelines, between six and ten percent

(generally 8%) of direct program cost are allocated to evaluation. Nearly every state and federal program at the Center is supported by evaluation, resulting in the component being responsible for evaluating over forty programs. Programs evaluated are diverse and include, for example, such programs as teacher training, bilingual/migrant education, guidance and counseling, youth employment training and adult education. The multitude of funding sources creates a fairly stable income for the component: a loss of one source does not significantly impact the operation of evaluation. This fact, coupled with the Center's proven ability to secure federal, state and foundation funding, helps insure a reliable funding base for operation.

The decision to fund evaluation as a contracted service was made primarily for administrative reasons. The alternative was having a separate evaluation budget for each of the forty programs to be evaluated--a situation that could have created serious managerial difficulties. Accepting the provision of contracted service created a lesser problem. It is necessary for program staff to keep time and effort records reflecting the amount of time spent on each project. Each project is then being billed for the number of staff hours spent on it based on an hourly rate. The hourly rate is determined by dividing the component's expected expenditure by the number of staff hours projected to be spent on program evaluation.

As the Center functions very effectively as a change agent, many exciting activities, including interesting workshops, well known and respected guest speakers and worth while conferences are continually being offered. Although indirectly related to conducting program evaluation, these activities are difficult to directly relate to a specific project. This is because that when funded as a contracted service, only hours worked on a project can be charged against the project account. Attendance at a

workshop in organizational leadership, for example, could not be charged to any fund except one relating to that content area. The assumption is made that attendance at the workshop was necessary for evaluating/understanding the project. This situation caused evaluation staff to attend "non-related" workshops more selectively.

Procedures used for determining evaluation funding caused considerable confusion among program staff. Communication difficulties centered on whether evaluation costs was supplemental or part of regular project operations. For most new projects,evaluation cost was supplemental; most Center staff thought the cost was part of the regular operating expenses and saw money that they had believed ear-marked for carrying out their program being unexpectedly whisked away. Once actual funding provisions were explained to them, resistance to evaluation rapidly decreased. A very real problem, however, existed between evaluation staff and staff of projects with continued funding. For these projects evaluation was not funded as a supplemental cost. The total dollars available for these projects was reduced by the amount for evaluation (usually about six or seven percent of the total budget). These people saw evaluation taking funds that they could use (and had planned to use) for carrying out their program. Furthermore many project staff were not really sure of the amount of evaluation money to be taken from their projection--a situation made worse by the fact that the first billing for evaluation services did not take place until the project year was nearly two-thirds over.

Setting priorites

It is essential that an organizational entity have a set of goals which communicate its purpose and future direction. Such a statement of mission is especially important for a new unit, which is trying to become part of

an established institution. When the component was begun in July 1977, it was assumed that all contracted monies would be pooled and charges made to a central account. Operationally this meant that the Center would assist the component in determining which projects were of the highest institutional priority and, correspondingly, these projects would receive priority evaluation attention. This decision was communicated to Center staff vis a' vis the component statement of mission. Living up to the intention of this statement, evaluation plans were designed for the seven Center projects seen as priority.

Evaluation efforts for these projects was well under way when in January 1977, just five months after the inception of the component, the rules of the game needed to be changed.

We were told that to be in compliance with the state funding guidelines we needed to address each project from which we received funding in proportion to the amount of dollars received. Predictably, this occurence caused considerable frustration on the part of evaluation staff. More confusing was the fact that the component's statement of policy, which was being prepared for the Board, was changed considerably in content--much to the frustration of already perplexed Center staff.

Concurrent with the change in funding procedure was the unexpected growth of the component staff. The component grew from a staff of four in September, 1977 to a staff of seventeen in August 1978. This rapid growth corresponded to a large number of new programs being added to the Center. Throughout the year the Center brought in considerable (unexpected) funding. Given the statement of policy which required that evaluation support the interest of funding awards as well as the Center operations, predictably,

the component grew in size. Center staff, already unsure about the concept of evaluation shook their heads in disbelief. As a result, evaluation staff became known as the "Gerbils" due, of course, to their ability to proliferate.

Allocation of evaluation staff to programs proved to be fairly complicated, due to the large number of seemingly unrelated programs to be evaluated and the fact that different levels for evaluation were required for many of the programs. After exploring several alternatives, a workable arrangement was found that involved dividing up the forty some projects into three managerial units according to the content areas of special education, bilingual/migrant and adult/continuing education. A fourth managerial unit was created for all Title IV-C ESEA programs. Ideally each managerial unit should be responsible for between $60 and $90,000--a provision implemented during the second year. Each managerial unit should consist of a manager, two or three professional staff and a clerical assistant. During the first year only partial managerial units existed for each of the four areas. A rather interesting side issue related to this staff provision was that some of the work done by consultant staff could be performed by lower salaried clerical personnel. As a result, a lower level ($8 to $10,000) position was created to do some of the work previously done by higher paid staff.

Staffing

Qualified staff are necessary for any group to carry out its plan of action. In addition to the standard requirements for skill and expertise in program evaluation, we wanted staff to be highly skilled in inter-personal relationships, be able to adjust to the Center's change agent

environment and be a good manager of time and personnel. We were able to initially recruit two very qualified staff members who very capably assisted the Coordinator during the year. Recruitment of additional qualified staff proved to be difficult. Only recently has evaluation become important in the State of Texas and then only in its larger cities. What this has meant is that there is a very limited supply of qualified evaluation staff in the state. Recruitment of qualifed evaluation staff in a city such as San Antonio proved to be even more of a problem. The cost of living for the city is much lower than for the United States as a whole--making recruitment at a national level difficult, due to the apparently low starting salary. A second drawback to recruitment was that San Antonio has no institutions of higher learning granting doctoral degrees and, unfortunately, existing institutions do not emphasize quantative areas such as statistics, research and evaluation. Hence, a generally reliable source of potential staff--the local university, was of little assistance. In summary, with few exceptions it was not possible to find applicants qualified in the area of inferential and descriptive statistics and experienced in program evaluation.

Given these limitations we choose to hire staff who had strong inter-personal skills, were good communicators, and who had a high aptitude in the quantative area. Staff were selected from over three hundred applicants. Backgrounds varied from educational and military research to administration at the state level. About half of the staff had public school experience. As the size of the component grew, selection of new staff became somewhat more difficult, making it necessary to hire staff on a part-time temporary basis before a final decision on (permanent) hiring was made. One factor which limited staff effectiveness involved organizational socialization (Van Naanen, 1978): it generally took new staff several months to adapt to

the changing environment of the Service Center as well as the newness of the evaluation setting in which they were working. This factor limited the efficiency of the unit for the first year. This situation has been somewhat remedied in our second year. Five monthly inservices on evaluation and related topics have been held for all staff members. Furthermore, a course in inferential statistics offered from the University of Texas at San Antonio is being provided at the Center, one evening a week, during the second semester of the school year.

Some products

Considering the evaluation work to be performed, demand for evaluation service from Center staff quickly exceeded the capacity of available resources. The unit was overloaded with requests for general technical assistance in such areas as test interpretation, data analysis, instrument development, etc. The resolution of this problem was accomplished by producing an evaluation plan for each project (developed cooperatively with program staff based on program objectives) and carrying out only those activities given in the plan. The evaluation plan represents the work to be completed as a contract for evaluation in support of project activities. Included in the plan are a program summary; an evaluation perspective which includes limitations, future directions and parameters; and an evaluation design which gives a statement of each program objective, evaluation questions related to that objective, data collection procedures employed (instrument sample, date and person responsible) and subsequent analysis to be performed. The purpose of evaluation plan is to secure agreement between project and evaluation staff in an attempt to insure evaluation information collected would be useful in making programmatic changes.

As noted earlier when starting up we had not planned to thoroughly evaluate the over forty projects from which funding was received. The advent of the new funding procedures made it necessary to evaluate each of these projects. Consequently, the spring brought frenzied activity by evaluation staff attempting to concurrently negotiate evaluation plans and complete evaluation work. Component performance was credible under the circumstances.

Two-thirds of the projects had signed evaluation plans although evaluation plans were prepared for every project. An evalution report was prepared for each project.

Considerable evaluation staff time was expended assisting Center staff prepare measurable objectives and/or evaluation plans for their proposals. This process proved to be frustrating yet rewarding. Evaluation staff slowly became exposed to projects they were evaluating; project staff began to realize what was meant by having something "measurable". In a few cases, project staff employed a form of resistance called coopting (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978) where they were outwardly supportive, yet were not committed to the overall proposal effort. In these cases, objectives were "drafted" by evaluation staff (in retrospect a rather damaging procedure that was eliminated during the second year). To the credit of the institution, measurable performance objectives were made part of every proposal written during the year to allow for enhanced institutional accountability.

Evaluation Services were, and are, dedicated towards measuring the effectiveness of teacher inservice training--a process which involves training teachers in workshops, assisting them in implementing the program and providing follow-up assistance and relevant instructional materials. Implementation is viewed as accomplishment in terms of a process (such as a manager system), an

acquired skill (being able to develop a learning center), and utilization of materials (fourth grade mathematics curriculum). Effectiveness of workshop training is measured by a normed Workshop Evaluation Form, and whenever possible, pre and posttests. Degree of implementation is measured by surveys, questionnaires, etc., with increasing emphasis being placed on measuring implementation using focused Levels of Use interview techniques developed by Gene Hall and Susan Loucks (1977) at the University of Texas at Austin.

Additional responsibilities include conducting needs assessment and other surveys, assisting project staff developing measurable objectives, developing evaluation sections for continuation and new application and serving as facilitators for using evaluation information.

The component's single most important contribution for the first year was the development of measurable performance objectives. This effort was demonstrated in over sixty grant applications containing nearly 650 measurable objectives. These objectives are guiding evaluation efforts for the second year. Another important product was, of course, evaluation plans and resulting evaluation reports for each project.

The most important outcome from the unit was that it was gradually accepted into the Center. Toward the end of the year evaluation staff was consulted before information was collected and more significantly Center staff became receptive to using evaluation information for making programmatic improvements.

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